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Wilberforce University And the Third Episcopal District

● The Third Episcopal District embraces all of the states of Ohio, ~~and~~ West-Virginia + ~~a part of~~ Western Pennsylvania. In this large area, the A. M. E. Church has less than fifty thousand members. The Ohio annual conference is the ^{mother of the} Pittsburgh, Indiana, Kentucky, North Ohio and West Virginia conferences. I contain more people holding the ~~the~~ college degrees of Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Master of Arts and Bachelor of Divinity ^{than any other district} in our denomination. I estimate that ninety seven percent of its Negro population is literate.

● Before we went to the Cleveland General Conference, ~~at~~ at their request, I promised the South Carolina delegation I would return + serve them for another quadrennium. Toward the close of the Conference, the Third District earnestly requested me to come + serve them. I was forced to decline because of my promise to South Carolina. I suggested they try to get Bishop John A. Gregg to come + serve them. I sincerely believed that among all the bishops he was the one who could best serve their present unhappy condition. Bishop Gregg declined. Then they earnestly pleaded with me again to come + serve them. I finally told them I would do so if South Carolina would release me. I persuaded South Carolina to release me + take Bishop Noah W. Williams. To this they unanimously agreed.

The very day I entered upon the task of supervising the work of the Third Episcopal District, a towering mountain stood athwart my path, growing down upon me. It was a mountain of debt, debt upon debt, piled up so high it seemed impossible to scale it.

I found the total, acknowledged indebtedness of the University being in the form of a first mortgage covering the entire plant & property of Wilberforce University including Payne Theological Seminary. The school did not have a dollar in its Treasury. It owed a milk bill of \$500.00, a bread bill of \$1200.00, meat bill over \$1800.00. While both the electricity & the telephones were threatened to be cut off within a week. We owed the unpaid teachers thousands of dollars & we owed Bishop J. H. Jones \$125,000.00 of it, note for money he said he had advanced.

In desperation I sent Mr. Ira T. Bryant the following telegram - "I am sinking. Must have \$3000,000.00 before twelve o'clock next Monday. Please let me have it. I will repay." Without the stroke of a pen by way of security, he sent it promptly & thus enabled us to ward off disaster.

Dr. Gilbert H. Jones, son of Bishop Jones, was the President of the University at the time, but the authority & control were assumed by Bishop Jones. Dr. Jones is a scholar, an educator & a gentleman. For him personally, I have

cherished high esteem, but because of the attitude of Bishop Jones toward me personally, I felt sure, under the almost chaotic condition of the school finances, I could not as Chairman of the Trustee Board of the University, possibly go forward with him as president. I so informed the trustees, a majority of them took the same view + Dr. Jones was relieved of the presidency.

Following this, the trustees invited Dr. Charles H. Wesley, then Dean of the Graduate School at Howard University to be our president. He accepted offer. But when he came + our mountain of debt + the challenging conditions that surrounded it, he resigned the presidency + went back to his deanship at Howard. This was to us a disconcerting blow + made our confusion more confused.

The trustees then offered the presidency to the scholar, editor + minister, Dr. R. R. Wright Jr. He deliberated for three weeks before accepting our offer. Fortunately for our situation, Dr. Wright had both training + experience in business management. He proceeded alone to face the involved situation that confronted the

University. He made necessary adjustments & got the finances under control; he strengthened the faculty, built up the enrollment of students & above all he restored confidence. This happened in the dark & trying years of the depression, 1932-1936.

This was as great a feat as Bishop Jones had performed by building Shorter Hall by sheer faith & courage.

To Rev. Wright belongs the honor of placing the University on its feet to travel the road of development & progress.

Few men of his generation have responded more eagerly to their opportunities for education & service, than has Richard R. Wright Jr. His father, Major R. R. Wright, traveled from the pit of slavery to become President of the Citizens Bank & Trust Company, in the City of Philadelphia. Enroute to this position, he was some years President of the Georgia State College for Negroes. He was appointed by the late President, William McKinley, to be a pay master in the United States Army where he rose to the rank of Major, to finally become president of one of the most solid banks in the country. He sent his son, Richard, to the University of Chicago, where graduated. From there he went to the University of Berlin, Germany, finally receiving the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania.

R. R. Wright ⁵ Jr. was elected a Bishop in
the African Methodist Episcopal Church in
at its General Conference in New York
City May 1934.

Stop here

The Fraternal Council of Negro Churches
in America.

Commissioner of the Ohio Board of Pardon
and Parole

The Presidential Campaign 1928

When the Presidential Campaign of 1928
opened, with Ex Governor Alfred E.
Smith of New York as its standard
bearer, Mr. James H. Farley sent for
me to the Democratic Head Quarters,
for a conference with him.

He probably did this because I was at the
time one of the most widely known men of
our group to be avowedly committed to the
Democratic Party. Mr. Farley wanted few
words. He said he wanted me contact
as many influential Negroes as I could
throughout the country, to do missionary
work among our people to break old



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political ties & support our ticket in the
national campaign. I agreed to undertake
the job. He asked how much I would charge,
I told him, "nothing." He turned & looked at
me in astonishment. He said, "it requires money
to do a job like this. I must know how much
you expect the Committee to pay you."

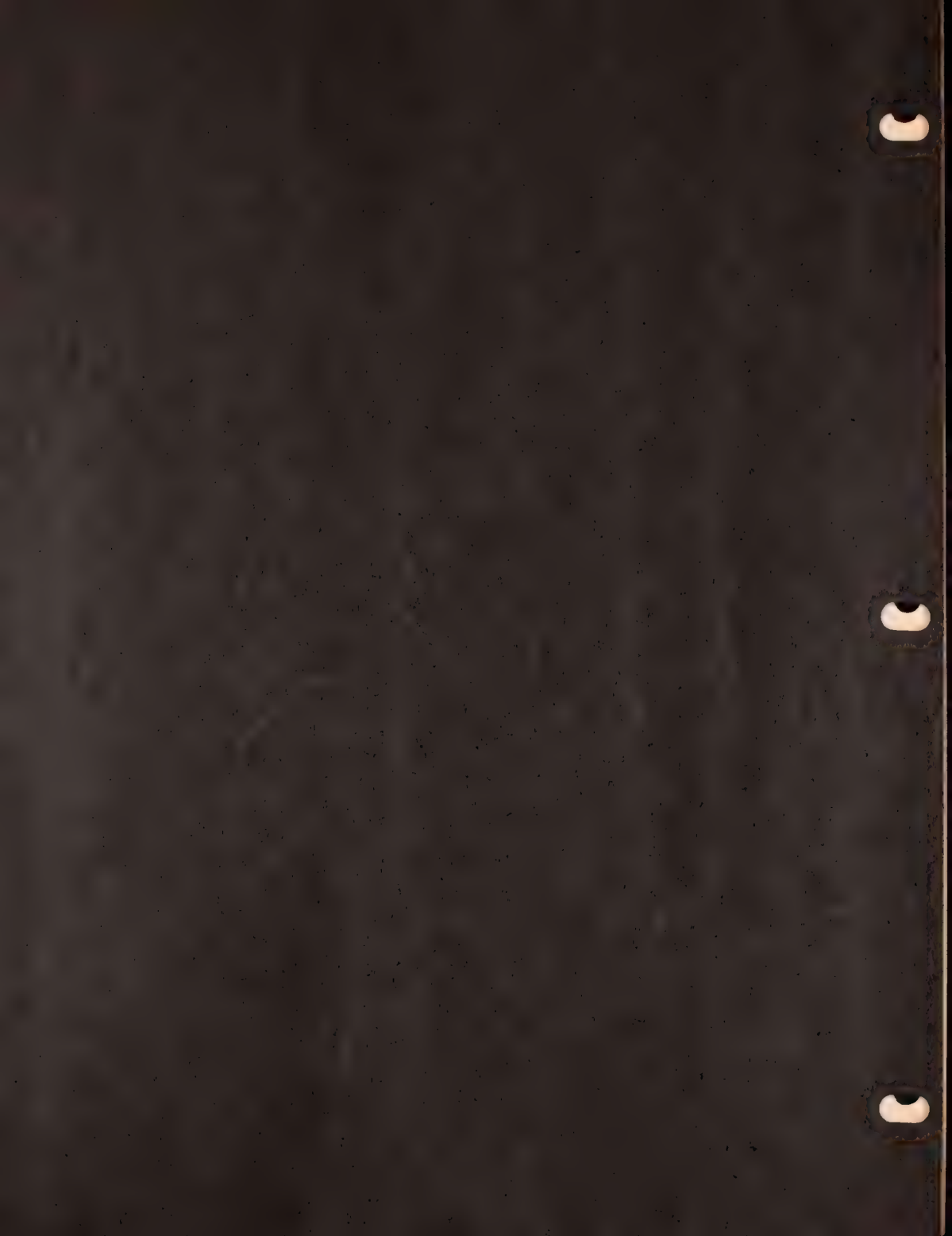
I replied, - "Mr. Farley, I want exactly what
I have said, positively nothing. You pay the
actual expenses connected with the work, that is
all I ask. The chief fault of our leaders was
to create Negroes politically conscious of
the fact that they would break their slavish
adherence to the Republican Party to the
political advantage of their people."

I was roundly misrepresented & denounced
throughout the country, called "traitor" &
"political Judas," who had "sold" his
soul to the Democratic Party.

We resorted to many devices to reach & influence
our people. Among these was a meeting
we held in a large casino in Harlem.
We did not use the democratic label,
but auspices of the United Civic League.

Among other groups, we invited Father
Shivins. He came & brought two hundred
of his "angels" with him.

seated at my side on the platform,
 at the close of my address, he said to me, —
 "Ransom, I am short & insignificant
 looking, if I were tall like you & could
 stride across the platform as you do, I
 would make these Negroes stand on
 their head." When he spoke, he swept the
 house with applause, his "angel"
 crying, "Peace, it is wonderful!"
 At the end of the campaign, Mr. Farley &
 several members of the National Committee,
 warmly congratulated & thanked me for
 service. Then Mr. Farley said: "Bishop,
 a woman up in Connecticut admires
 your service to the campaign so much,
 she has asked me to hand you this
 token of appreciation." I put it in
 my pocket. When I opened it later, I found
 it to contain five thousand dollars.
 Of course, "the woman in Connecticut"
 was pure fiction. It was Mr. Farley's
 way of saving me from being "a hireling" of
 the Democratic National Committee.



Dr. H. Edmund Walker at Wellesboro

Dr. R. R. Wright Jr. at one time served as the de facto President of Wellesboro Community. During his first incumbency, he retained his position as Editor of the Christian Record & served the University as "Acting" President. With his election to the Bishopric, the presidency became vacant. Dr. H. E. Walker, then minister of St. James Church, Chardon, Ohio, accepted the invitation of the trustees & was elected President of Wellesboro Community. Dr. Walker had much to offer not only by way of scholastic training, but a vigorous, dynamic personality, who had sufficient amplitude of understanding to meet & cope with the many complex situations confronting him. He began with a firm hand where Bishop Wright left off, so there was no loss of momentum in the progress of the School. He fostered the religious life of the students, upheld the morale of the University as a whole. But also, like myself, politically he was a member of the Democratic Party.

From as far back as the nineteenth century,
 Willbergore has been one of the seats of republican
 party power & influence. There were centered a group
 of the most highly trained men in the state.
 The late Bishop B. W. Smelt who lived there -
 Pres of Senate, was an orator, & clever
 politician, joined with Mr. James Poinsett,
 then minister of the Second Republic & Lincoln,
 Columbus, Ohio. These two exerted a
 potential influence on Ohio State politics,
 Poinsett was appointed to the board of the
 Public Schools, Smelt was elected to the
 State Legislature. No spot in Ohio was so
 completely owned & controlled by Republican party
 influence as Willbergore. The fact that
 the Chairman of the trustee board of the university, &
 Mr. Walker the President of the university, was
 resented as an invasion of vested, political
 power & control.
 President Walker made his matters
 worse by recommending to the trustees the
 dismissal of five professors all at the
 same time. He challenged the board
 that they must choose between them
 men & him, if they were not dismissed
 he would resign.

Then the cry was taken up that these

The trustee board, with great reluctance, voted the President's recommendations. Then the cry was taken up that these people had been dismissed because they were Republicans. The then Governor, John W. Bricker, to begin with, heartily disliked Mr. Walker.

The cry of political martyrdom by the Governor & other high Republican State officials. Then members of the State Appointments Board, headed by Attorney Ray E. Hughes coming into action. They threatened that if President Walker were not dismissed, the State would withhold the sums amounting to more than eight thousand dollars paid to the Administration for professional services rendered to the State. This was a most effective step. The fear of the Ohio State Republicans was that they would lose the funds in which they had put their money. They were not strong enough at present to succeed in having a vote on the Board with the State Council. The retention of Mr. Walker was what I have said in the long, long

expedient to yield to their presumptory
 with great reluctance, we vacated
 the presidency of one of the most
 capable presidents Wilberforce Univ. ever
 had. In the light of what followed I
 think now it would have better had
 we stood by our guns. The State by its
 very nature is political, the Church is
 religious and spiritual, their ideals
 goals and attitudes are wide apart.
 The attitude of the State appointed board
 of power and domination at Wilberforce
 can never be satisfied. This has been the
 case for the past forty years. The day
 shall come when Wilberforce University
 will stand fearlessly upon its feet and
 be the keeper of its own spirit without
 yielding to the ever changing attitude
 of different political parties who gain
 control of the state administration from
 time to time.

